


THE
ANNUAL ADDRESS

OF THE
Conference

TO THE
METHODIST SOCIETIES

IN
GREAT BRITAIN,

IN THE CONNEXION ESTABLISHED BY THE
LATE REV. JOHN WESLEY, M.A.


AUGUST, 1822.

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1822.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Superintendents of Circuits, or their Colleagues, are directed by the Conference to read this PASTORAL ADDRESS to every Society, at the first convenient opportunity. And a copy of it is to be furnished, gratuitously, to every Local Preacher and Class-Leader in Great-Britain.

ADDRESS.

DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN,

It is with gratitude to God that we review his mercy and goodness to us, as a body, during the past year. Our Societies have in general been in a state of prosperity; a gracious influence has rested on the people; and we have much cause of thankfulness, that the good effects of that influence appear to have been experienced in almost every part of the kingdom. When it pleases the Most High to pour out his HOLY SPIRIT on any particular Society, or in any part of his vineyard, such special visitations are causes of rejoicing: but when the prosperity of the work of God is general, we consider it as a signal proof of the divine favour. The number of members added to our Societies this year, in this kingdom, is Eleven Thousand Three Hundred and Twenty-eight, and in the Missionary Stations, One Thousand and Eighty; and we confidently hope, from the steady and growing work which is now carrying on, that it is the prelude of a glorious ingathering of souls to SHILOH.

During the year, it has pleased the LORD to call home seventeen of the Preachers, seven of whom were employed in the Missionary department; but though we have to lament the loss sustained by the Church of God, in their removal, we have cause to acknowledge the divine goodness in enabling our dear Brethren to rejoice in their affliction, and to triumph in the prospect of eternal glory. The LORD is also graciously raising up a number of faithful labourers to enter into the vineyard; and he who has qualified

them for the work, will be with them in it, and crown their exertions with success.

From the time when it pleased God first to raise up the Methodists as a religious body, they have been an active and a zealous people; but never did we know them more willing to labour in the cause of our REDEEMER, than at this time. Wherever the love of CHRIST is experienced, there will be an ardent desire that others may be brought to the knowledge of salvation through the blood of the everlasting covenant; and all true Christians, while they look for present acceptance and eternal life solely through the merit of the SAVIOUR'S death, will, at the same time, deeply feel the necessity and importance of being actively employed in the service of God, and of showing their faith by their works.

We hope that our Class-Leaders will endeavour to watch over the souls committed to their care, as those who are to give an account to the Great Shepherd. Their charge is of the highest importance; and if in the spirit of prayer they endeavour to lead forward the members into all the salvation procured for them through the blood of the REDEEMER, their labours will continue to be crowned with success. God surely will be with them and bless them, if they are diligent and faithful in the work to which they have been appointed.

Our Local Preachers also are employed in a glorious work,—in helping us to carry the glad tidings of salvation to the inhabitants of the towns and villages, in the Circuits where they reside. The Lord has long blessed their labours; and considering the large portion of our population who are yet living without God, and some of whom are daily dropping into eternity, there is evidently a wide field before them, in which they may expect to reap a still more glorious harvest.

In some parts of the kingdom our people have been diligently employed in establishing Prayer-meetings in villages, and in the poor and neglected parts of large towns, in addition to those Meetings which had been long in existence, and had been much owned of God. We hope that such Meetings will yet be more generally established, both in towns and villages. Notwithstanding the great exertions of the various denominations of Christians to spread the savour of the knowledge of CHRIST throughout the kingdom, it is to be feared that thousands of our countrymen seldom or never attend any place of worship: were prayer-meetings established near their dwellings they might be induced to attend, and thus be reclaimed from the paths of sin, and brought to a saving acquaintance with God. We have full proof that those of our Members who are employed in conducting these prayer-meetings, have received much spiritual good to their own souls; and as God "heareth prayer," we trust that the supplications of the thousands of our people who are thus engaged, will be answered in the great enlargement of the REDEEMER'S kingdom.

The Circulation of Religious Tracts has also, through the blessing of God, been productive of much good; and we cannot too strongly urge it on our people, wherever it is at all practicable, to adopt a regular plan of Distribution, by lending Tracts from house to house, and to endeavour in the most extensive manner to disseminate the knowledge of divine truth. The enemies of religion and of social order have been actively employed in spreading the poison of immorality and infidelity; and we are desirous that our friends, in every part of the kingdom, should zealously counteract the leaven of evil, by

carrying the doctrines of the Gospel into all the habitations of ungodliness, and labouring to rescue from the dominion of darkness those who have been led captive by the Devil at his will. If the Sermons of MR. WESLEY, and those Religious Tracts which are most weighty and impressive, be widely circulated, we have no doubt they will be the instruments of leading multitudes of souls to an eternity of happiness.

We cordially approve of the exertions of many of our people, in instructing the Children of the Poor in Sunday-schools; and we are desirous that such exertions should be continued, and that this system of instruction should become more general and extensive. At the same time, we strongly urge it on our friends who are engaged in that good work, to have respect, in an especial manner, to the spiritual good of the children. All the Managers and Teachers should consider the eternal salvation of the children as their grand object in those institutions; and should be careful that every part of the instruction given to them is such as may, through the blessing of God, lead them to the knowledge of the SAVIOUR, and finally to eternal glory. We must also strongly urge the attendance of the children at public worship on the LORD'S-DAY, in order that they may be trained up in a love of the regular ordinances of God's House, which we consider as essential in the Christian Church.

At the same time that we, in the strongest manner, press on our people the necessity of active exertions in the cause of God, we would earnestly enforce the great importance of their living in the spirit of their high and holy calling. We are especially called to be a holy and spiritually-minded people, and we

should be careful not to rest below our exalted privileges.

It is the privilege of all the followers of our blessed LORD, to enjoy a clear and an abiding evidence of the favour of GOD. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with GOD through our LORD JESUS CHRIST." That peace may ever dwell in our hearts,—the HOLY SPIRIT bearing witness with our spirits, that we are the children of GOD; and we may walk in the unclouded light of his countenance. We are also called to enter into the holiest by the blood of JESUS, and to know by happy experience that the HOLY SPIRIT purifies the heart from all pollution; and we exhort those among you who have tasted that the LORD is gracious, to "go on to perfection." Let none of us be satisfied to live below that entire sanctification which we are called to enjoy. We remember the remark of our venerable Founder, that GOD raised up the Methodists "to spread scriptural holiness over the land;" and we are anxious that our Societies should be patterns of eminent piety and christian purity.

We hope that our people are careful to appoint suitable times for family prayer, and for reading the word of GOD in their houses. Every morning and every evening the whole of the family should (if possible) be collected together, and, before prayer, a portion of the Sacred Volume should be read; for whatever excellence there may be in other writings, they ought not to supersede the regular and stated reading of GOD's word.

We also exhort our people to pay particular attention to the spiritual instruction of their servants. Proper opportunities should be allowed for their attendance on the public worship of GOD, and suitable time for reading the Bible, and for other religious

duties. Servants who reside with families ought to be considered as a part of the charge of those persons who employ them, upon whom devolve the important duties of endeavouring to lead them to the knowledge of God, and of promoting their eternal salvation.

Though the religious education of the children of our friends is a topic which has been frequently mentioned, we again affectionately recommend an increased attention to their instruction in sound christian principles, and the adoption of some regular plan for that purpose. If a system of Catechetical Instruction were constantly pursued, we have no doubt it would be attended with much and lasting good. Parents should appoint stated times for that necessary and important work, and endeavour to render them as profitable as possible. They should also make it a point of conscience to take their children with them to the public worship of God. Families should appear together before the LORD; for even before children are capable of fully understanding the sermons which are delivered, it is of importance to train them up in the habit of regular attendance on public worship, that a love to divine ordinances may grow up and strengthen as they rise to years of maturity. We likewise deem it necessary to caution Parents against permitting their children to read those books which have a tendency to demoralize all who peruse them, and especially young persons. The press teems with Novels, and other corrupt publications, many of which are written in such an artful and specious manner, that particular vigilance ought to be exercised on the part of Parents and Guardians, to prevent their admission into their families. When once the youthful mind is tainted with the poison

of such publications, works of a serious tendency are generally slighted, if not despised; and if the natural depravity of the human heart be fed by books of that description, profligacy and immorality of conduct will be the almost certain consequences. In selecting suitable works for young people, close attention should be given to soundness of principle, that while their minds are expanded by useful knowledge, they may be preserved from the snares of vice and infidelity.

We earnestly advise our people to make themselves well acquainted with the writings of the venerable founder of Methodism, the REV. JOHN WESLEY. His Sermons, Journals, and other Works, are invaluable; and we hope that all our friends, who have it in their power to procure them, will make them standard books in their families. Every Methodist should be familiar with them. In soundness of doctrine, clearness of statement, and close and powerful application, we believe his Sermons have never been excelled. Our Magazine, also, is valuable and important, as it continues to show, from year to year, the progress of the work of God among us. We consider that periodical publication as highly deserving of attention from the religious world at large, and especially from our own people. The accounts of Christian Experience, and the sound Divinity, inserted in its pages, are such as even the aged Christian may read with much profit; while the notices of the enlargement of the REDEEMER'S kingdom, both at home and abroad, and the literary and miscellaneous information which it contains, must render it additionally interesting to our young people. If the minds of our members, and especially of those who are just rising into life, be well stored with sound and

scriptural knowledge, their principles will become firm, and through divine grace they will be prepared to meet the attacks of infidelity and error, without falling in the time of trial. In this day of blasphemy and rebuke, it becomes highly necessary thus to fortify them against temptation.

We feel it our duty most affectionately to remind those of our dear people who are engaged in commercial affairs, that it is their duty to abstain from those *speculations* in business, which may involve them in difficulties, and by oppressing their minds with worldly care, unfit them for spiritual duties, and prevent that communion with God in which alone they can enjoy permanent happiness. There is great danger lest persons in trading or mercantile life should be induced, by the hope of larger gains, to push their business to an extent beyond their capital, and, in the end, should entangle themselves and their friends in perplexity and trouble. We also advise all our friends to be careful to live within their income; to avoid all extravagance and unbecoming expensiveness in their mode of living; and to let their moderation be known unto all men. And we exhort them in every thing, by prayer and supplication, to make their requests known unto God; so that in temporal, as well as in spiritual affairs, every thing may be conducted in the fear of the Lord, and with a single eye to his glory.

We cannot omit this opportunity of acknowledging the goodness of God in causing peace and tranquillity to dwell within our land. The days of tumult are passed away; and we are thankful that our people so generally evinced, in times of disorder, loyalty to our Sovereign, and attachment to his Government. We trust that the same scriptural principles will ever

be firmly maintained by our Societies. The Methodists have from the beginning been a loyal people : and we ought now to be more than ever grateful to ALMIGHTY GOD for the privileges which we enjoy. By the wise and righteous laws of our land, our religious liberties at home are securely guarded ; and our Missionaries, who are employed in preaching the Gospel of CHRIST in various British Colonies, are not only preserved from public persecution, but receive countenance and encouragement from many of the Governors of those Colonies, and from other persons of high station and influence.

On reviewing all the mercies which GOD has showed to us as a people, we are constrained to acknowledge that nothing has failed of all that the LORD had promised, and that he has blessed us abundantly, above all that we or our fathers expected. He hath made us a people who were not a people ; and called us to become the partakers and witnesses of his great salvation. May our conduct ever evidence that we have received the grace of GOD in truth ! Let us live in the spirit of deep piety, and of entire devotedness to GOD, remembering that the shadows of this world will soon pass away, and that the grand business of life is to secure an eternity of happiness. The day is at hand when every thing of a merely temporal nature will fade from our view ; and when the solemn realities of the invisible world will open before us. Then CHRIST will be all in all to the believer ; who, resting on his atoning blood and almighty love, will be enabled to triumph over the last enemy, and enter into the joy of the LORD.

Our Conference, which is now drawing to a close, has been conducted in peace and harmony, and the presence of GOD has been graciously manifested in

our assembly. In some of our Public Meetings we have been favoured with much divine influence, particularly at the time when the young Preachers, who have finished their probation, were solemnly received into full connexion with the Conference. These seasons of heavenly visitation we receive as tokens for good, and trust that all our people will unite with us in fervent prayer for a more general and copious outpouring of the HOLY SPIRIT. If the thousands of our Israel will earnestly plead with God for that promised and all-comprehensive blessing, the glory of the LORD will more than ever rest upon us; our holiness and usefulness will be increased; we shall rejoice together in his salvation on earth; and finally meet in his eternal joy.

Signed by order of the Conference,

ADAM CLARKE, *President*

ROBERT NEWTON, *Secretary.*

London, August 14th, 1822.

